

## **E4U National Reports: introducing Belgium**

I live in Weerde, it's a small town near Mechelen, the city where my school is located, it's quite young and has a rather small population. Weerde is located inside Zemst, which is a rather big town if you take all the smaller sub-towns into consideration. Zemst has everything you need: a (very good) bakery, sandwich bar, lounge, bank, ATM's, several supermarkets from different price ranges, butcher, pubs, fitness, you name it! However, Zemst is not a place for tourists, at all, there are no monuments, hotels, motels, and jobs are scarce, there's enough for the current population, but if it continues growing we'll eventually run out completely; although, towns like Mechelen are very close to Zemst, easily accessible by public transport, and they've a lot of jobs.

Family life in Belgium is rather normal and probably meets your expectations, it's not that different from the rest of the world; every family has an average of about two children.

I'm not sure whether or not it's common to have grandparents live in your household, as I personally don't, but people might, I'd find it rather weird and to be honest, probably a bit annoying; I'd rather send them to a foster home.

Our school system is probably one of the 'best' in the world in the 'official' documents, however for pupils it's a disaster!

On Monday, Thursday, Tuesday and Friday, we have seven classes, each class takes fifty minutes, no breaks in between, and sometimes we even have EIGHT classes!

We get a fifteen minute break after the third class, and one hour after the fifth, for lunch.

On Wednesday, we only have four classes, thank God!

Students are evaluated by tests conducted periodically, most of the time they're announced but if the teacher likes annoying the pupils, they could take tests unannounced, and that's the worst that could happen to a regular pupil!

On the end of each trimester, we get exams, which is also a big nightmare, every day for about 7 days straight, we get (big) tests of each class, about everything we've covered in that trimester, it's a hellhole..

Now, on to social life:

(Nearly) nobody cares about what other people do in public, but there's certain limits.

It's completely fine by 99.9% of the entire population to do things like: smoke in public, chew gum in public, blow your nose in public, kiss in public etc., however things like farting loudly, or burping loudly in public are considered unacceptable by a lot of people, however if you manage to do it silent nobody will notice ☺.

Greeting people is self-explanatory, really.

If males greet each other, informal it'd be simply shaking their hand, nodding at them or saying hello, formally you'd just shake hands.

Going to my favourite part, food!

The cuisine here is rather unhealthy, however because it's so good we force ourselves to believe that it's healthy so we can eat it a lot.

Belgium's known for things like chocolate and beer, but there are some other mostly unmentioned foods that everybody'll love, and if you don't, you're not a human being.

One of those unmentioned foods are French fries (or in Britain, chips), not the ones like in the McDonald's, but actual proper French fries (or chips) with a sauce of your choice, and meat like a 'currywurst' or 'mexicano', things you can't find in other countries; and the best part about it: there's

an actual type of business that specializes in making our French fries, and you can find them everywhere around Belgium.

When it comes to Famous Belgians, it's mostly singers, actors or people who have a lot of money, I'll name three examples:

Peter Van den Begin: my personal favourite, he's an actor, and a very good one, mostly plays in comedy movies.



Sven De Ridder: Often seen acting with Peter Van den Begin, also one of my personal favourites, a very good actor and one of Belgium's most popular.

Natalie Meskens: Also in my top three, she's an actor, singer and presenter all-in one! She plays in various movies and also sings, mostly parodies of other songs for a Belgian TV program named 'Tegen de Sterren op'.



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